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Letter to President Sarkozy

At the UN, France Must Move to the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons

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It was a historic day, 24 September 2009: The US President chaired a special session of the UN Security Council which brought together the leaders of the member states and which was devoted to nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. President Obama proposed to the other heads of state, including Nicolas Sarkozy, that they should all move towards "a world without nuclear weapons". What will France do now? Behind the scenes she lobbied to reduce the "zero option" to no change or no change to speak of. This is a cause for grave disquiet. On the subject of nuclear disarmament Jean-Marie Matagne had written to President Sarkozy the previous week on behalf of ACDN. His letter appeared on 24 September in Ouest France, a newspaper distributed in 12 départements of Western France which has the highest number of daily readers in France - and which is the only daily to have opposed France's "nuclear strike force" from the beginning.

But what did the other media say? The previous evening the two presenters of the major TV chains (TF1 and France 2) together interviewed President Sarkozy for half an hour in New York. They uttered not a word about the historic session of the Security Council. Not a single question about France's nuclear policies. As if none of that was taking place. Sarkozy, for his part, did not mention it. But he seized on the chance of the word "jobs" to proudly list his arms sales to Brazil, the very sales that the president of ACDN denounced in his letter. That was the only mention of French weapons - his praise for the benefits they bring. He listed all the arms sales except one: the one that will enable Brazil to acquire a nuclear attack submarine. He ignores disarmament. He ignores Article VI of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. He ignores nuclear weaponry, except of course if it is Iranian. That's how it is with France and her military hardware: disinformation for the good folk of France and criminal trade with foreigners. Oh what lovely toys we have!

Saintes, 18 September 2009

Faxed and mailed to

Mr President, Palais de l'Elysée

SUBJECT: France's Policies on General and Nuclear Disarmament

Copies to :

M. le Premier Ministre, Hôtel Matignon

M. le Ministre des Affaires étrangères, Quay d'Orsay

H.E. Ambassador of France at the UN, New York

Monsieur le Président,

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The abolition of nuclear weapons, which is the objective of ACDN, will be also the main purpose of the special session of the UN Security Council to be held this 24 September on the initiative of the US President and under his chairmanship. You have been invited there with all the heads of state of the Security Council member states, both permanent and temporary. For this reason we are wondering what position you intend to adopt in the name of France, i.e. of your fellow-citizens, including ourselves.

The letter that you sent to the UN Secretary-General on 5 December 2009, when you held the presidency of the EU, seemed to give some indications about this matter :

"The United Nations has an important role to play in the debate on disarmament. Europe wishes to take full part in that. That is why I have wished to draw your attention to the proposals that the EU has just presented this year in the UN.

"As I said on 23 September last at the UN General Assembly, Europe wishes to act for peace. This is true for the struggle against terrorism, for the struggle against proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems, and for the management of crises.

"It is true also for disarmament, notably nuclear disarmament. Europe is particularly concerned, since two European states possess nuclear weapons. Europe has already done a lot for disarmament. Knowing that her security benefits also from efforts for general disarmament, Europe is ready to do more; our ambition bears on all dimensions of disarmament, since we are convinced of the need to work for general disarmament. In this field as in others, Europe wants to act under the guidance of an overall political and strategic perspective."

However, two weeks later, while in Brazil, you obtained that nation's agreement to buy from France some 50 military helicopters, 4 Scorpène-class submarines, and the hull of a Nuclear Attack Submarine ; quite recently, your rapid trip to Brazil resulted in the sale of some forty Rafale military aircraft. The bill for these weapons will exceed ten billion euros and Brazil will also receive technology transfers.

We are embarrassed about this: if France's contribution to « general disarmament » consists of arming foreign countries, is that because France is not part of Europe, or because the French word « désarmement » means the opposite of disarmamemt?

That question leads to others: how will you understand the term « nuclear disarmament »? Does it mean only disarming others, or does it include disarming France? If the latter, will France accept the setting-up of a negotiations process aimed at deciding and adopting a convention for the elimination of all nuclear weapons ?

In the new international context marked by the serious possibility of universal and comprehensive disarmament, would you be willing to say, on behalf of France, that her nuclear strike force is no longer necessarily « the nation's life-insurance policy », as you described it, twice, when writing to us during the 2007 presidential campaign? That is anyway what we wish for.

We are far from being alone, since according to a poll commissioned by « GlobalZero » from WorldPublicOpinion.org and conducted in 21 countries between January and August 2008, a very strong majority of world public opinion was favourable or very favourable to the abolition of nuclear weapons : 76 % on average. This proportion has probably increased since then, given that President Obama announced in Prague, on 5 April 2009, that the USA wanted to abolish all nuclear weapons including its own. The US then opened negotiations with Russia for a successor to the START Treaty, with a view to a treaty for drastic mutual reductions of their arsenals - negotiations made even more promising now that the Obama administration has just lifted the main obstacle to their success by announcing that it

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will not install in Poland and the Czech Republic the base and radar equipment for anti-missile missiles as had been planned under the « anti-missile shield » project.

In 2008, the proportion of public opinion favourable to a (duly verified) abolition treaty for nuclear weapons was already as high as 69 % in Russia, 77 % in the USA, 81 % in the UK, and 83 % in China ... It was 86 % in France (with 58 % classed as « very favourable »), which was the highest proportion for all the nuclear weapons countries.

Admittedly those are poll figures, and polls don't make policy any more than the Stock Exchange basket did in the Gaullist tradition.

That's why we would be glad if you took the initiative of yourself declaring France's resolute support to the declared objective of President Obama, not only during the special session of the Security Council, but later in the months leading up to the 8th Review Conference for the Non-Proliferation Treaty, in May 2010.

Subsequently, nothing would prevent you from holding a referendum on the results of the negotiations.

In conclusion, may we draw your attention to the initiative of various NGOs who are calling on the UN to make 27 October an annual Nuclear Disarmament Day, to be celebrated every year until all nuclear weapons are eliminated. We would like France to support this initiative, as a symbol of her clear political will.

We send our respectful greetings to you, Monsieur le président, as citizens of the French Republic.

For ACDN,

Jean-Marie Matagne, President

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